

## Shirkul Asghar (Minor Shirk)

Call To Islam Research

Shirkul asghar or minor shirk does not expel one from the Religion of Islam, but it causes a deficiency in Tawheed; and it is a way to major Shirk. Do not think though that this minor shirk is a small issue, as the sin of committing minor shirk is worse than the major sins – you have in order of gravity: major shirk then minor shirk and then comes all the other sins. So minor shirk is worse than committing murder or adultery.

Minor shirk can be divided into two categories: Apparent Shirk and Hidden Shirk.

### APPARENT SHIRK:

The first category is apparent or obvious Shirk. It can be divided into two categories: Statements and Actions:

#### Statements:

##### (a) Swearing:

So from the statements which are minor shirk is swearing by other than Allaah, such as saying: "By the Ka'bah..." or "By the Sacred House..." The swearing by other than Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) is shirk no matter how elevated the status of the object upon which the oath taken is. The Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said:-

"Whoever swears by other than Allaah, commits disbelief or shirk" <sup>1</sup>

The correct way to swear is to say: "By the Rabb of the Ka'bah" or simply "By Allaah....."

##### (b) Willing:

Also from the statements which is minor shirk is saying: 'What Allaah wills **and** what you will.' This statement was made by a man to the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) who objected to it by saying:

"Do you make me a rival along with Allaah? Say: What Allaah alone wills." <sup>2</sup>

Similar to those statements are: "I have none to resort to except Allaah and you." or "this is from the blessings of Allaah and your blessings."

The correct statement is to say: "Whatever Allaah wills and **then** you will." Or to say "Whatever Allaah wills" only.

<sup>1</sup> Hasan: Related by Abu Daawood (3/570), at-Tirmidhee (3/253), who said: "A Hasan Hadeeth." It was authenticated by Imaam ash-Shawkaanee (Rahimahu 'Llah) in Naylul-Awtaar (8/257) and by al-Albaanee (Rahimahu 'Llah) in Irwaa'ul-Ghaleel (2561).

<sup>2</sup> Hasan: Related by al-Bukhaaree in al-Adabul-Mufrad (no. 783), and by Ahmad (1/214), and an-Nisaa'ee in al-'Amalul-Yawm wa-Laylah (no. 995), and Ibn Maajah (no. 2117). It was authenticated by al-Arna'oot in Takhreejul-Musnad Abee Bakr (p. 55), and by al-Albaanee (Rahimahu 'Llah) in as-Saheehah (no. 139).

This is because the particle “**then**” denotes sequence as well as delay, thus to signify that the will of the slave is subservient to the Will of Allaah. Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) says:

**“And you will not, unless (it be) that Allaah wills, the Lord of the 'Alameen (mankind, jinns and all that exists).”<sup>3</sup>**

As for “and” it signifies absolute combination and association, it does not denote order or sequence.

## **Actions:**

As for the actions, then examples of it are:

- (a) wearing a amulet, ring, bead, bracelet, chain or thread to remove an affliction, or illness;
- (b) hanging an amulet or wearing a ring, chain or thread in fear of the evil eye or other than it.
- (c) hanging a horseshoe, rabbits foot or the like to bring good fortune or a charm to prevent misfortune.

It is important to note that if it is believed that these things are causes for the raising of an affliction or illness, and averting misfortune or bringing benefit, then this is minor shirk, because Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) did not make these to be causes for such things. However if it is believed that these created things protect, remove illness and bring good fortune in and of themselves then this is major shirk, because that is devotion to other than Allaah.

## **HIDDEN SHIRK:**

The second category of minor Shirk is hidden shirk or *Shirkul-Khafee*. It is shirk in desires and intentions. Imaam Ibnul-Qayyim (Rahimahu 'Llah) said:

“As for Shirk in desires and intentions, then it is a sea without a coast, very few are saved from drowning in it. So whoever desires other than the Face of Allaah for his action, and intends something other than attaining closeness to Him, and seeking a reward from Him, then he has indeed committed shirk in his intention and desire. Sincerity (ikhlaas) is that all of his actions, statements, intentions, and desires are made purely for Allaah, and this is the pure Religion (Millatul-Hanafiyyah) that Allaah commanded all of His servants with, and nothing other than it will be accepted from any of them, and this is the reality of Islam. Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) said:

**“And whosoever seeks other than Islam as a religion, then it will never be accepted from him. And in the Hereafter, he will be from amongst the losers.”<sup>4</sup>**

This type of shirk is what the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) feared the most for his Ummah even more so than the Dajjal. Abu Sa'eed al-Khudree (Radiya 'Llahu 'anhu) said:

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<sup>3</sup> Suratut-Takwir (81):29

<sup>4</sup> Suratul Aali-'Imraan (3):85

"We were talking about Maseehud-Dajjaal in the presence of the Messenger of Allaah (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam). He said: "Shall I not inform you about something which I fear more for you than Maseeh ud-Dajjaal?" We said: "Of course, O Messenger of Allaah!" He said: "The Hidden Shirk. A man stands for prayer and beautifies his prayer for those who are watching him.""<sup>5</sup>

This type of shirk is the most difficult to tackle and control as evidenced by numerous statements of the scholars. Among them:

Imaam Ibnul-Qayyim (Rahimahu 'Llah) who said, as has preceded:

"As for Shirk in desires and intentions, then it is a sea without a coast, very few are saved from drowning in it."

Sufyan al-Thawri (d161H) (Rahimahu 'Llah) said:

"I have not tried to cure from myself anything harder than my intention, for it keeps changing on me."

Sahl ibn Abdillaah (d283H) (Rahimahu 'Llah) said:

"There is nothing tougher/harder upon the soul than Ikhlâas (sincerity to Allaah). How many times have I tried to extinguish riyaa from my heart and it is as if it has appeared in a different colour (i.e. a different form)."

So if the ones that we take our knowledge from speak with words such as these then what about us??

It is part of human nature to love leadership and praise. Doing religious acts to impress people in order to be praised by them is therefore a most fearful evil. This danger becomes really significant to Muslims since their goal is to make all the acts of their lives acts of worship. In fact, the likelihood that true believers would commit major shirk is small because it's pitfalls are so obvious. But for the true believer, the chance of committing riyaa is great because it is so hidden. It involves the simple act of changing one's intention and the motivating forces behind it (love of leadership and praise) are strong because it comes from man's inner nature. Satan fuels these motivations until he lands the person into Hell-fire.

Hidden shirk can be divided into two categories: Sum'ah (seeking good repute) and Riyaa' (showing off). The difference between the two is that sum'ah is the performance of good deeds in order to be heard and riyaa is the performance of good deeds to be seen.

## **Sum'ah**

So, sum'ah is where one performs an action which brings a person closer to Allaah, and desires the praise of the people by it, like the person who recites the Qur'aan with a good voice and recitation, so that the people will hear him and praise and commend him for it.

## **Riyaa'**

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<sup>5</sup> Collected by Ibnu Majah authenticated by Shaykh Al-Albaanee in Sahih Sunan bin Majah vol.2 p410 No 3389

As for riyaa, linguistically it comes from the root 'ra'aa', which means "to see, to behold, to view." The derived word 'riyaa' means "eye-service, hypocrisy, dissimulation."

From the Shari'ah point of view, it means:

"To perform acts which are pleasing to Allaah with the intention of pleasing other than Allaah."

Riyaa' is when a person mixes his action with that which negates it. Thus, righteous deeds done for worldly gain have been transformed into evil deeds unacceptable to Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala). As riyaa' is very subtle it makes it among the most dangerous and difficult to diagnose.

Its importance cannot be over-stressed, because the character, which Islam seeks to build, would be incomplete without a clear understanding of this subject. It is extremely important for the God-fearing to know the factors that contribute Riyaa' to one's Islam.

## Types of Riyaa

Hussain Al-Awaa'ishah (Hafidhahu 'Llah) explains the different types of riyaa to be: <sup>6</sup>

### 1. Riyaa' Of The Body:

This occurs by appearing to be emaciated and pale so that others may see the intensity of his striving and the abundant fear of the hereafter. Also included in this is lowering the voice and sinking of the eyes, showing that one has a weak and feeble body in order to show others that he is diligent in observing fast.

### 2. Riyaa Of The Outward Appearance:

Such as the effects of prostration on the face or wearing a specific type of clothing which only a few people wear whom people consider to be scholars. So he wears this apparel so that it may be said. He is a scholar.

[Or the opposite, a person who does not care for his appearance, dresses shabbily in order to show that he does not care for worldly appearance, but rather he is concerned only for the hereafter. Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) says:

**"And when you look at them, their appearance pleases you; and when they speak, you listen to their words. They are like blocks of wood propped up. They think that every cry is against them. They are the enemies, so beware of them. May Allaah curse them! How they deviate from the Right Path!"** <sup>7</sup>

However, to maintain a good appearance for the sake of looking nice, (as opposed to for attracting attention and praise), does not constitute riyaa'.] <sup>8</sup>

### 3. Riyaa In One's Speech:

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<sup>6</sup> Extracted from *The Book Of Sincerity* by Hussain Al-Awaa'ishah

<sup>7</sup> Soorah Al-Munafiqun (63): 4

<sup>8</sup> The part in brackets is an addition and not part of the shaykh words.

This occurs mostly by admonishing others, reminding them, memorising details and narrations for the sake of argumentation, making it open and known that one has copious and abundant knowledge, moving one's lips for the remembrance of Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) in the presence of others, becoming angry when evil occurs between people, lowering the voice and making it soft and tender when reciting the Qur'aan so as to show others his fear, sadness and other such things.

#### 4. Riyaa With One's Actions:

Like the showing off of the worshipper by lengthening the standing and prolonging the rukoo' and sujood. Also outwardly displaying khushoo' and showing off due to fasting, going on military expeditions, pilgrimage, charity and other such things.

#### 5. Riyaa On Account Of One's Friends And Visitors:

Like the one who burdens himself in order to visit a scholar or a pious worshipper so that it may be said: So and so visited so and so. This also occurs by inviting people to one's house so that it may be said: The people of Deen frequently visit him.

#### **Being Inwardly Dissatisfied With What Allaah Had Decreed:**

Another type of hidden Shirk is being inwardly dissatisfied with the inevitable condition that has been ordained for one by Allaah; conscientiously lamenting that had you not done such and such or had you approached such and such you would have had a better status.<sup>9</sup>

And also from shirk of desires and intentions is that one attains knowledge, or performs Jihaad for the sake of wealth or praise. The Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said:-

"May the slave of the Dinaar be degraded and may the  
slave of the Dirham be degraded"<sup>10</sup>

#### **The Dangers Of Riyaa':**

So there are many dangers of riyaa' among them are:

##### 1. Risking prohibition of entrance to Heaven:

Performing righteous acts for human praise can also lead to being barred from entering paradise. Abu Hurayrah (Radiya 'Llahu 'anhu) quoted the Messenger of Allaah (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) as saying:

"Whoever gains any knowledge that should be learnt for the sake of Allaah, (with) the intention of (benefit in) this world will not even smell the fragrance of Paradise on the Day of Judgement."<sup>11</sup>

##### 2. Weakens Eeman and Tawheed

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<sup>9</sup> See *Interpretation & Meanings Of Noble Qur'an* M. Khan p900 under Ash-Shirk al Khafi

<sup>10</sup> Related by al-Bukhaaree (no. 2887)

<sup>11</sup> Sunan Abu-Dawud, vol.3, p.1039, no.3656 and Sunan ibn-Majah, vol.1, p.144, no.252

By committing 'riyaa', a person destroys the very purpose of his creation - to worship Allaah alone - since instead of truly worshipping Allaah, he pretends to worship Allaah while seeking to achieve the pleasure and praise of the creation of Allaah.

Allaah describes the true believers as those who perform their acts of worship solely for the sake of Allaah, not desiring reward nor thanks from others for their deeds. Allaah says:

**"And they give food, despite their love for it, to Miskin (poor), the orphan, and the captive. (Saying): 'We feed you seeking Allaah's Countenance only. We wish for no reward, nor thanks from you. 'Verily, We fear from our Lord a Day, hard and distressful, that will make the faces look horrible (from extreme dislikeness to it).'"**<sup>12</sup>

In direct contrast to this, Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) says about the hypocrites:

**"So woe unto those performers of prayers (hypocrites). Who delay their prayers from their stated fixed times. Those who do good deeds only to be seen (of men)."**<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Increases Misguidance:

There is no doubt that the person who commits riyaa' has a disease in his heart, and if this disease is not cured, it will lead to further problems. In this regard, Allaah says,

**"They (try to) deceive Allaah and those who believe, but they only deceive themselves and do not even realise it! In their hearts is a disease (of doubt and hypocrisy), and Allaah has increased their disease...."**<sup>14</sup>

### 4. Deprives Deeds of Blessings:

The Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wasallam) has informed in a number of his statements that Allaah will not accept actions done for the sake of others. Mahmood bin Labeed related that the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wasallam) said:

"Allaah the Exalted, will say (to those who practised riyaa') when He is taking account of people's deeds (on the Day of Judgement). 'Go to those whom you used to show off your deeds to, and see if you will find any reward with them!'"<sup>15</sup>

### Pure And Mixed Riyaa During Action And Its Consequences:

Ibnu Rajab al-Hanbali (Rahimahu 'Llah) said: "Performing an action with the intention of not doing it for the sake of Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) is of different types:

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<sup>12</sup> Sooratul Insan (76): 8-10

<sup>13</sup> Sooratul Maun: (107): 4-6

<sup>14</sup> Soorah Al-Baqarah (2): 9-10

<sup>15</sup> Sahih at Targheeb wat-Tarheeb, no.29

**1. Pure riyaa.** The intention for the action could be solely for the sake of showing off to the people and to gain a worldly benefit. This type of intention should never come from a believer and without a doubt, this type of intention nullifies the action and the doer of that action deserves punishment from Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala).

**2. Mixed riyaa.** The intention for an action can be mixed (ie to please Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) as well as to show off). So if the showing off in this intention was from the very beginning of the action, then this action will be false as is proved by all the authentic texts in this issue.

However, if from the very start of the action, the intention was for the sake of Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) alone and then later on riyaa came into the intention but the individual begins to fight this riyaa, then there will be no harm upon his action due to this riyaa. Although there is a difference of opinion amongst the scholars regarding an individual who does not fight the riyaa that comes into his intention but rather accepts it and continues with his action:

a. The first group of scholars say that his action will be nullified due to the riyaa contained in his intention.

b. The second group say that Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) will reward such an individual with the full reward because the origin of his intention for that action from the start was for the sake of Allaah alone. Thus, there will be no harm upon him.

## The Cure – Ways To Avoid Riyaa'

(a) Increasing Knowledge:

One of the cures for the vast majority of the problems Muslims face, is to increase their Knowledge of the religion. Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) says in the Qur'an:

**"It is only those who have knowledge among His slaves that have awe (khashyah) of Allaah."**<sup>16</sup>

(b) Invocations (Du'aa):

Among the strongest repellents of riyaa' and one of the easiest, is du'aa. The du'aa for protection against riyaa' is:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ أَنْ أَشْرِكَ بِكَ وَأَنَا أَعْلَمُ، وَأَسْتَغْفِرُكَ لِمَا لَا أَعْلَمُ.

**'Allaahumma** (O Allaah) **innee** (Verily I) **a'oudhubika** (I take refuge in you) **an ushrika** (lest I should commit shirk) **bika** (with you) **wa anaa a'lamu** (knowingly) **wa** (and) **astagfiruka** (I seek your forgiveness) **limaa** (for what) **la a'lamu'** (I do unknowingly)."<sup>17</sup>

Also one should make dhikr and remember Allaah as He (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) says:

<sup>16</sup> Soorah Fatir (35): 28

<sup>17</sup> Sahih al-Jaami, no. 3731



**"Verily, those who are Al-Muttaqûn, when an evil thought comes to them from Shaitaan, they remember (Allaah), and (indeed) they then see (aright)."** <sup>18</sup>

(c) Reflection Upon Heaven And Hell:

Reflection on the Hereafter helps one develop more fear of Allaah, and increases one's desire to stay away from sins. If a person realises that his purpose in life is not to gain fame and prestige, nor the acceptance or happiness of others, but rather to save himself from Hell and enter Paradise, he will try his utmost to avoid riyaa'.

### **The Mistake Of Abandoning An Action Fearing Riyaa:**

"...Leaving an action out of fear of falling into riyaa is one of the biggest mistakes and ways of falling into the trap of Shaytaan. If the intent and motive for an action is correct and righteous and if it is in agreement with the Sunnah then the action should never be abandoned due to the presence of the danger of riyaa' Rather it is obligatory upon the Muslim to strive against this threat and danger. This is achieved by making his heart cling to modesty in front of Allaah (Subhanahu wa ta'ala) and fear of Him, and changing the praise and admiration of creation for Allaah's Admiration and Praise.

Fudayl bin Ayaad (Rahimahu 'Llah) said: Doing an action for the sake of people is shirk and leaving an action for the sake of people is riyaa. Ikhlaas is when Allaah saves you from both." <sup>19</sup>

I shall mention now some further words of wisdom from our Salaf regarding Ikhlaas (sincerity to Allaah), for us to reflect upon:

Ya'qoob al-Makfoof (Rahimahu 'Llah) said: "The sincere person is the one who hides his good deeds just like he hides his evil deeds."

As-Soosee (Rahimahu 'Llah) said: "What Allaah intends/wants from the actions of the creation is Ikhlaas and nothing else."

Abu Uthmaan (Rahimahu 'Llah) said: "It is forgetting the sight of the creation by continual observance of the Creator."

Ibraheem bin Adham (Rahimahu 'Llah) said: "He has not been truthful to Allaah who loved fame (and recognition)."

Yahya bin Abu Katheer (Rahimahu 'Llah) said: "Learn your intention for it is more serious than the action."

Ibn al-Mubaarak (Rahimahu 'Llah) said, "maybe a small action is made great by its intention, and maybe a great action is made small by its intention"

And Shaykh al-Albaanee who "...gained wide and vast fame and notoriety in all of the different regions of the world, even though he did not seek after it nor strive for it... On the contrary, he would run away and flee from it... would always repeat these words: "Love for fame will break one's back." <sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Soorah Al-A'raf (7): 201

<sup>19</sup> Extracted from *The Book Of Sincerity* by Hussain Al-Awaa'ishah

<sup>20</sup> Taken from Shaykh Al-Halabee's book: *"With our Shaykh, the Upholder of the Sunnah and the Religion, Muhammad Naasir-ud-Deen Al-Albaanee"*



And I shall end by quoting The Most High:

**"Say: Whether you hide what is in your breasts or reveal it,  
Allaah knows it...." <sup>21</sup>**

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<sup>21</sup> Surah Aali Imraan (3): 29